**Extract from original research notes compiled on the Lawngaw event written in Burma (with grateful thanks to Hka Lum and other members of the Lawngwaw Culture and Literature Committee)**

In contradiction to Green’s claim that they copied the manao from the Hkahku, the Lovhar claim to have been the ‘inventors’ of the manao posts and that other groups merely copied and adapted them.[[1]](#footnote-1) In their legend the khyae dao arose as a result of a vision or hallucination by the ruler Aung Phaung Dang who had fallen into a coma for nine days. This vision of two posts was seen in the Kingdom of the Sun and upon his return he began the tradition of dancing around the khyae dao. These two posts were *shao phaung* (male) and *shao nao* (female). Later Aung Phaung Dang wanted to expand the khyae dao to make it more meaningful and so adopted one more *shao nao* post to make one male flanked by two females which came to represent the family circle. This gradually expanded to represent the community as a whole. There is therefore no stipulation that there should always be multiples of two in a Lovhar khyae dao. Likewise, the posts are not positioned as alternating male and female posts but as two males flanked by females. There was greater freedom amongst the Lovhar for the holding of private zham gow, although still prohibitively expensive for many, but families would try to have these events every three years if possible. I was told that the number of posts could be influenced by the number of family members, the side posts representing the number of children.

The eight post khyae dao had some similarities with the Myitkyina posts. The shape of the uprights was again that of a traditional dah, male posts were convex and female posts concave at the tip. But the Lovhar posts represent a different orientation in other respects. The designs were replete with nature symbolism. The following account follows the order in which the posts were erected.

Post 1 - *Na Pho Zang* (centre right) This male post is considered the post of tame/domesticated animals but is primarily that of the family and community - first is the husband and wife, then parents and children, brothers and sisters and kinsmen. The intertwined cords represent the father’s side and the mother’s side which twist together forming the community. Although on this post the cord was painted I was told that traditionally it would have been a carved and pierced vine or creeper.[[2]](#footnote-2) It had evidently proven too difficult to find someone to attempt this rather intricate carving.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Post 2 - *Kyo Pho Zang* (centre left) This post represents cultivated crops, leaves and grains, fruit and flowers.

These two posts both stand under the sun and together symbolise human unity, all the edibles needed to sustain life and the unity of these two in the creation and maintenance of life. The Lovhar considered the sun to be the male heavenly body in contrast to the ‘Jinghpaw’ tradition.

Posts 3 & 4 *Na Myhi Zang* (2nd Right) & *Kyo Myhi Zang* (2nd Left) These posts are erected simultaneously and are both female and are under the moon, the female heavenly body. The post on the right represents the mother of all human beings. The curved paintings represent the way of the dance and its spirit - unity, co-operation and love for each other by joining together. The geometric design on the post on the left represents seeds and grains. Yet it also symbolises the continuity of the generations and the connectedness of the lineage as seen in the Lovhar naming system. First a family name is given and then the father’s and then the child’s. For men the names are:

1st son - Khao

2nd son - Leim

3rd son - Dau

4th son - Ze

5th son - Zaung

6th son - Hhao

7th son - Dai; and so on

Thus a man could have the name Zhum Zaung Khao, for example, meaning 1st son of the 7th son in the family Zhum. A similar system is in effect for women’s names. I met one elder who, in the space of two minutes, could recount thirty five generations of his family and could trace his ancestry directly back to Aung Phaung Dang via this linked naming system. When I asked how he had learned this he said it had been due simply to the constant repetition by his family elders. It was the transmission of this kind of heritage that was deemed so important at the Lashio zham gow.

Posts 5 & *6 Qid Yug Zang* (outer posts) These posts represent the other essentials of life, air and water. The triangular shapes at the top are mountains and the post on the far right represents air in the form of cool mountain breezes coming down into the valleys. The post on the far left represents water, especially rain in the mountains leading down into the flowing water of the river.

Horizontal Beam - *Khyae Dao Kyin*

There was only one horizontal beam, with no hornbill and a greater number of animals painted upon it than that seen in Myitkyina. The concept behind this post was the unity of all living things - grains, fruit, domesticated and wild animals; all the essentials of life. The fish represents all the creatures of the sea and man’s daily food. The crab is there because it makes holes in the earth enabling water to come through. According to legend the porcupine rose into the heavens and made holes in the sky to permit the sun’s rays to shine through.

The Crossed Posts - *Pyao Chae* (left) & *Pyao Shae* (Right)

There was only one pair of crossed posts at the rear unlike at Myitkyina and the Lovhar elders tried to explain these as part of a continuum culminating in the cross of Christ’s self-sacrifice. However, they also explained that the original recipient of the sacrifice would not have been the madai nat, as Green claimed when he said they had taken this from the Hkahku, but the sun god. This was the highest being in their religious tradition. These crossed posts were of both different shape and design to each other but together represented the tools necessary for hunting and cultivation. That on the left represented a spear. The curved white line upon it is symbolic of water, especially its purifying qualities and the necessity of it for life and irrigation. The post on the right was shaped as a dah but the design, which was clearly that recalled by the lady in Myitkyina and may be indigenous to Shan State, represented hearths in the home. There should be a minimum of three hearths as they also represent the family (mother, father, children), but the number is not fixed and would usually reflect the number of family members. Odd numbers would be perfectly acceptable.

The Colours of the Khyae Dao

Green says of the Lovhar:“Like the Nungs they all love bright colours.”[[4]](#footnote-4) One of the first comments that was made to me upon arrival in Lashio was that I would have to watch the dance to see all the colours together. According to Lovhar tradition, the light of the sun’s rays produces 12 colours. All colours, life and properties are therefore derived from the primary source of the sun, the moon and the stars being secondary to it. The ceremony that was being performed in Lashio was derived from that which was previously done for the sun god. At this ceremony only 6 colours would be used. I was told, intriguingly, that the full range of 12 colours would have been seen at another ceremony, the Sacrifice of the Lord of the Rainbow. The meanings of the colours were as follows:

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| COLOUR | MEANING |
| white | sincerity of heart, honesty, simplicity |
| red | heroism, bravery, daring, willingness to offer one’s life |
| green | the environment, vegetation to sustatin the life of men and animals, freshness, richness, mountainous and open scenery which inspires vitality of thought especially for the composing of folk songs |
| yellow | the sun, source of all things including joy and knowledge |
| black | darkness; human beings were in the darkness of ignorance and poverty, hardships, poverty, storms, famine, but they have survived and overcome these difficulties |
| blue | the mother of the Pyu, Mug Nyhug Nyhug Nau; heaven and all the celestial females |

This interpretation of the colours embraces all facets of human life and emotion. It reflects the intention of the zham gow as being primarily a meeting for the transmission of knowledge about life, of education in and through the old stories and traditions, not just a forging of unity. The combined symbolism of the posts is knowledge of everything that the elders can give to the new generation, to guide them on the right path with a respect for their traditions.

1. Green, op cit p,228 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. It would also be seen in the chief’s house. Green states, op cit p.225, that ‘Maru’ houses were unusual for the degree of carpentry techniques that were used, joints being dovetailed rather than lashed [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. There was also an error in the painting of the outer post on the right (facing) which was a different colour on the reverse. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Green, op cit p.224 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)